



By Arthur Ellis—The Washington Post

The Rev. William Wendt of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church offers sacramental bread and wine to Randy

Spenser at a requiem mass for slain Black Panthers. About 25 attended the service in front of Justice Department.

Mass for Black Panthers Held Before Justice Building

About 25 persons, almost all of them white, prayed, sang and shared ceremonial bread and wine in front of the Justice Department yesterday in an ecumenical requiem mass for slain members of the Black Panthers.

The Rev. William A. Wendt, pastor of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church here, presided at the service, held under bleak skies at 12:30 p.m. He was aided by a fellow Episcopal minister from Jersey City and by a Catholic priest from Newark.

"We are here because there is oppression in the land," Father Wendt said. Among the most severely oppressed groups, he said, is the Black Panthers.

A statement read by the Rev. Robert W. Castle of Jersey City, said that 28 Panthers have been killed through "the murderous practice of genocide." Many others are now political prisoners, the statement added.

Signed by the ad hoc Committee to Fight Oppression, which held the service, the statement said, "We see the roots of this oppression in our government and implemented by our 'so-called' Justice Department."

The statement asked support of Panther programs

aimed at aiding the poor, and asked that people "organize in their communities to put a stop to the rise of repression in our country."

During the 25-minute service, Father Wendt stood near the curb on the Pennsylvania Avenue NW side of the Justice Department. Over his corduroy coat and black turtleneck sweater he wore a black requiem mass vestment embroidered in gold.

The knot of participants huddled around him, hunched against the chill wind. A woman known as Mother Scott played a guitar and sang. Justice Department employees stared out of the office windows.

"Especially remember those who died in the wars in the United States," Father Wendt

said. "Especially those Black Panthers who have died . . . and all the other oppressed."

Finally, he poured burgundy wine into two chalices on a small table set on the earth near the curb. He broke two 3-foot loaves of french bread, and passed around the sacramental bread and wine.

Participants took it, ate, drank, clapped hands and sang.

"We are fed, Lord," Father Wendt said. "We thank you for the new opportunity you give us to bring . . . freedom."

Several men wearing snap brim hats stood watching nearby.

A young woman participating said she believed they were undercover police. "You can tell," she said. "They never take the bread."